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Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Friday, 6 November 1992, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. PHOOFOLO (Lesotho)
(Vice-President)

- Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development [79] (continued)

  (a) Report of the Conference

  (b) Report of the Secretary-General

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In the absence of the President, Mr. Phoofolo (Lesotho), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 79 (continued)

REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

(a) REPORT OF THE CONFERENCE (A/CONF.151/26 (vol.I-IV and vol.II/Corr.1)

(b) REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/47/598 and Add.1)

Mr. BILOA TANG (Cameroon) (interpretation from French): At the outset I should like once again to congratulate the Secretary-General, the Secretariat, the staff of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) and the bodies and committees that contributed to the success of the Conference held at Rio de Janeiro in June. We pay special tribute to Mr. Maurice Strong, Secretary-General of UNCED, and to Ambassador Tommy Koh, who presided over the preparatory work and the Main Committee of the Conference.

I am also pleased to reiterate our gratitude to the Government and the people of Brazil for their warm hospitality and flawless organization of the Conference.

Finally, my delegation would like to express its satisfaction and appreciation to the joint secretariat of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the African Development Bank, the United Nations Sahelian Office (UNSO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) for the assistance they provided to African countries, both during the preparatory process and during the Conference itself.

(Mr. Biloa Tang, Cameroon)

Twenty years after its Stockholm counterpart, the Rio Conference has served to remind the international community of the shared ecological destiny of mankind and to seal the link between the environment and development, which is now acknowledged and established.

In Rio, developed and developing countries alike declared their respective responsibility for the deterioration of the environment and agreed on the urgent need for active solidarity to cope, together, with the twofold challenge of protecting the environment and development.

(Mr. Biloa Tang, Cameroon)

In adopting Agenda 21, rightly described as "the cornerstone of international cooperation" by the Secretary-General, the countries of the North and the South agreed on the major outlines of the strategy to be adopted and on the choice of the ways and means to attain the ultimate goal of sustainable development.

However, as my delegation emphasized during the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council debate, inability to give tangible shape to commitments made by the international community still marks, unfortunately, one of the major impediments to achieving effective international cooperation.

In Rio, the United Nations displayed its capability for mobilizing around the concept of sustainable development. In fact, it managed to mobilize the delegations of over 180 States, most of which were represented at the level of Heads of State or Government, along with governmental and non-governmental agencies and business and other circles.

We feel that we have some grounds to hope that our Organization, under the leadership of the Secretary-General and guided by what has now come to be called "the Rio spirit" and stimulated by the determination of Member States, will manage to meet the challenge of the twenty-first century.

Against this backdrop, the role of the Commission on Sustainable Development will be decisive. Indeed, in accordance with the provisions of chapter 38 of Agenda 21, the Commission will be responsible for, among other things, ensuring effective follow-up to the Rio Conference, strengthening international cooperation, streamlining intergovernmental decision-making capability with a view to integrating environmental and developmental issues and taking stock of progress made in implementation of Agenda 21 at the national, regional and international levels.

(Mr. Biloa Tang, Cameroon)

However, in the view of my delegation, in order to carry out effectively the role of coordination and supervision assigned to it, the Commission on Sustainable Development will have to be made up of Member States selected for three years on the basis of equitable geographical distribution, be open to participation by non-member States and non-governmental organizations and have a separate secretariat endowed with adequate financial and human resources and headed by a high-ranking official.

Like other delegations, the delegation of Cameroon would welcome the nomination of Mr. Maurice Strong as head of that secretariat. Such an appointment would pay tribute to the major role he played in preparing for and in the holding of the Conference on Environment and Development, and would also make it possible to derive still greater benefit from the experience gained during the preparatory process that led to the Rio Conference itself.

For us, ensuring an effective follow-up to Rio means first and foremost identifying, negotiating and making arrangements for the financial and technological means which we badly need. Indeed, to live up to the commitments formally entered into at the end of the Conference, our countries need new and additional financial resources.

As stressed in chapter 33 of Agenda 21, these resources may be derived from official development assistance, multilateral development banks and funds, specialized agencies and bodies throughout the United Nations system, multilateral bodies for capacity-building and technical cooperation, bilateral aid programmes and private financing.

(Mr. Biloa Tang, Cameroon)

Arriving at a lasting solution to the debt problem is also a way of making additional resources available. No one is unaware of the heavy impact that debt has had on the development of developing countries, which must allocate their meagre resources to paying off principal and to debt-servicing.

Still on the subject of mobilizing financial resources, I should like to express our gratitude to all our partners who, in Rio, pledged their contributions, we very much hope that these generous indications will soon be translated into tangible commitments.

I also take this opportunity to reaffirm our support for convening a pledging conference, which might in fact be held at this session of the General Assembly.

The developing countries certainly enjoy a rich biological diversity, but, unfortunately, they are also suffering badly from desertification, deforestation, drought and other natural disasters. That is why we hail the principle of establishing an intergovernmental negotiating committee to work out an international convention to combat desertification, especially in Africa. We feel that the negotiations under way will lead to the establishment of the committee and to starting its work without delay.

As to forests, we welcome the consensus that emerged in Rio and that led to the adoption of the non-legally binding authoritative statement of principles for a global consensus on the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests. We believe that, on the basis of that consensus, an international instrument can be created to safeguard everyone's interests, while at the same time taking into account the economic role played by forests and the need to protect the environment.

(Mr. Biloa Tang, Cameroon)

From the perspective of a consistent policy of using and preserving natural resources, my Government established a Ministry of Environment and Forests.

Ever since the Rio Conference, Cameroon has at the national level resolutely striven, within the limits of its resources, to translate into action the commitments it entered into in the context of the Rio Declaration, Agenda 21, the statement of principles on forests, the Convention on Climatic Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

My delegation is actively participating in negotiations on various items in Agenda 21 that are also included on the agenda of this session of the General Assembly, and it hopes that, as in Rio, our deliberations will lead to conclusions that are satisfactory to all.

Lastly, the Rio Summit witnessed a wave of solidarity that we must maintain and enhance by giving effect to the statements and the consensus we arrived at together.

Indeed, the quality of the planet we wish to bequeath to future generations will depend largely on our determination and on our ability to translate into action both the spirit and the letter of Rio.

Mr. SIGMUNDSSON (Iceland): The international community has increasingly come to recognize the complex interrelationship between the environment and social and economic development. The link between the environment and the economy is but the most obvious example: without a healthy environment, economic development will not be sustained. In turn, the erosion of the well-being of our peoples undermines prospects for lasting stability and peace.

(Mr. Sigmundsson, Iceland)

The United Nation Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro was a landmark event, as witnessed by the wide participation of United Nations Member States. Its results provide a sound basis for further work in safeguarding our planet from potential ecological disaster.

Those welcome results notwithstanding, it is to be regretted that during the past year there have been no indications that the state of the global environment is improving or that we have managed to turn the tide. On the contrary, findings earlier this year show that a further depletion of ozone in the stratosphere and recent disclosures of massive discharges of radioactive waste and other hazardous materials into the Barents and Kara Seas from the former Soviet Union could constitute an ecological time bomb. Those and many other similar dangers have made the Earth appear smaller than ever before and demonstrate the need for enhanced international cooperation and stronger national commitment to environmental protection.

(Mr. Sigmundsson, Iceland)

Among the most important commitments in the Charter of the United Nations is the determination of countries to promote social progress and better standards of life in greater freedom. However, during the last 10 years social conditions in a number of countries have deteriorated. More than a billion people live in absolute poverty. All countries represented in this Assembly need to rise above their disagreements and act together in an effort to relieve the plight of those living under conditions of most abject misery. We must promote economic growth; that is of paramount importance in order to alleviate poverty, which is both the cause and consequence of environmental deterioration.

The end of the cold war has created new opportunities in the field of economic, social and environmental cooperation. This applies not least in the area of trade. It is paradoxical that the Uruguay Round is running behind schedule and is in danger of collapse. Its successful conclusion would create millions of jobs, promote economic growth and make markets more responsive also to environmental concerns. Furthermore, the international political climate is conducive to a substantial reduction in military spending - in the developing countries, too - and to diversion of these resources to more constructive use, which again would promote social progress and improve the environment.

The success of efforts to deal with global environmental problems and a long-term strategy to achieve sustainable development will depend in large part on how we manage population growth. With the present growth rate, the human race is likely to double in less than half a century. Obviously, all nations, rich and poor, owe it to succeeding generations to cooperate in achieving a major revision of policies in the field of population control.

(Mr. Sigmundsson, Iceland)

Turning to the follow-up to the Rio Conference, I would like to point out that a great number of acute environmental problems are addressed in the historic agreements of the Conference, the Conventions on climate change and on biodiversity, the Rio Declaration, Agenda 21 and the consensus on forests. Our efforts will, however, be in vain, if we fail to implement these agreements and the Conference's recommendations. Iceland has initiated a legal process to ratify the Conventions on climate change and on biodiversity.

Furthermore, an effective Commission on Sustainable Development is of paramount importance for the follow-up of the Rio Conference. We attach great importance to the efforts of the Secretary-General to strengthen and streamline the Secretariat, especially with regard to his objectives to integrate the purpose of the United Nations into the sectors of economic and social development and the environment. Moreover, we believe that a restructured Global Environment Facility should have a central role in distributing financial resources.

Iceland considers prevention of marine pollution, as well as efforts to ensure sustainable utilization of all marine living resources, to be a matter of priority. The oceans are not only a crucial part of the respiratory system of our planet, but also an indispensable source of food for mankind. The requirements of basic human subsistence make it imperative that the living resources of the sea remain available for human consumption. In order to achieve that objective, a far stronger emphasis must be put on conservation and the rational utilization of all marine species. In this respect, we must bear in mind that maximum sustainable yield of food from the marine environment will reduce the need for food production on land and is, accordingly, an important goal towards attaining sustainability. Moreover,

(Mr. Sigmundsson, Iceland)

marine resources could become one of the most important assets of developing countries as they strive for sustainable development.

It is of particular concern to my Government that in many parts of the world there are indications that fishing on the high seas is being carried out beyond sustainable levels. This underlines the need to agree on international rules to control high-seas fisheries in order to ensure sustainable utilization. Therefore, my Government is strongly in favour of the convening under the auspices of the United Nations of an intergovernmental conference with a view to promoting effective implementation of the provisions of the Convention on the Law of the Sea on straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks, in accordance with Agenda 21. We are not aware of any technical barriers which can hamper the convening of the conference next year.

The Government of Iceland considers pollution to be by far the greatest threat to the future sustainable development of the marine environment and its living resources. Therefore, it is our firm view that the nations of the world must give precedence to achieving international agreement on the control and reduction of marine pollution. Land-based sources contribute up to 70 per cent of all marine pollution. Therefore, we should draw up an international convention for the prevention of marine pollution from all land-based sources. The Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) could be encouraged to convene, no later than 1994, an intergovernmental meeting on the protection of the environment from land-based activities.

Persistent organic substances discharged into the sea, not least by the industrialized countries, pose a grave threat to the marine ecosystem. Such discharges must be brought to a halt and the precautionary principle applied.

(Mr. Sigmundsson, Iceland)

In this respect, we are of the opinion that the target to eliminate emissions or discharges of organohalogens could be reached by the year 2000.

Furthermore, we maintain our view that as a future objective a ban should be imposed no later than 1998 against all disposal of radioactive waste into the sea from land-based and sea-based sources. The dangers of nuclear accidents threatening the marine environment derive also from naval vessels, nuclear-powered vessels and vessels carrying nuclear weaponry.

In Rio the leaders of the world demonstrated their political will and commitment. We must now initiate concerted and fruitful global action. At risk is the credibility of our Organization and possibly the future of mankind itself.

Mr. ACHARYA (Nepal): The Rio Conference was one of the most important conferences ever held. The questions addressed by the Conference dealt with the life of the earth as well as life on earth. Its scope was as wide as the whole world. If the cold war threatened human life with a nuclear holocaust, global environmental degradation poses a threat of the same magnitude.

After the end of the cold war humanity will be engaged in no more important an issue than sustainable development. If the top 20 per cent of the world's population earns 84 per cent of the world's income, the model or development that the industrialized world has presented to humanity is unsustainable. Following the same model, if some 25 per cent of the world's population achieve the same level of income they may earn 100 per cent of the world's income. The remaining 75 per cent of the world's population, left with no income, will have to starve to death.

(Mr. Acharya, Nepal)

It is often said that poverty is a threat to the environment, but let us not forget the fact that the level of consumption the industrialized nations have presented to us has posed a greater threat to the world environment. Unfortunately, the developing nations are trying to catch up with the industrialized nations, as if unaware that it is a globally unrealizable goal: it is impossible to achieve the same level of consumption. The only way out may be, as the Swedish representative said, to "reduce, reuse, and recycle".

In keeping with the decision of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), the General Assembly must at this session give concrete shape to the international institutional arrangements within the United Nations system for the implementation of Agenda 21. My delegation shares the feeling that the follow-up to UNCED should be an integral part of the ongoing revitalization of the United Nations in the economic and social fields. The report of the Secretary-General (A/47/598 and Add.1), together with the statement he made at the beginning of the debate on this agenda item, has placed before the Member States the views of the Secretariat on chapter 38 of Agenda 21. These ideas need to be given serious consideration by the General Assembly. We endorse the Secretary-General's view on the composition and function of the high-level advisory board.

The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) will be a very important body of the United Nations. We believe, therefore, that if the Commission is to be efficient and effective it must be as widely representative a body as possible, capable indeed of representing the interests of all nations.

In addition to monitoring the programmes under Agenda 21, the CSD should also keep under constant review the adequacies of funding mechanisms. With

(Mr. Acharya, Nepal)

these ideas in mind, my delegation reiterates its endorsement of the position of the Group of 77 on post-UNCED institutional arrangements.

Effective implementation of sustainable development policies presupposes the need to enhance the capacity of developing countries, in particular the least developed among them. My delegation strongly supports Capacity 21, an important inititiative undertaken by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

I turn now to financial resources for the implementation of Agenda 21. Adequate funding mechanisms are at the very heart of this issue. My delegation therefore urges the developed countries once again to take urgent measures to fulfil their commitment to reach the agreed target of 0.7 per cent of their gross national product for official development assistance (ODA). As the Minister of State for Environment and Countryside of the United Kingdom said on behalf of the European Community, ODA is the main source of external funding for the least-developed countries (LDCs). The need for new and additional resources for prompt and effective implementation of Agenda 21 is therefore even more acute in the case of the LDCs.

For its part, Nepal has been taking a series of measures to implement the commitments undertaken at Rio. Nepal has begun the process of ratifying the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity. In keeping with the spirit of Rio, we are determined to keep the environmental consequences of our development policies under constant review. The Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-1997) places people at the centre of development as active partners in the process.

(Mr. Acharya, Nepal)

Nepal's efforts are focused on poverty alleviation, supported by participatory programmes of human-resources development with emphasis on raising the literacy rate, providing basic health, nutrition and clean drinking water, reducing the infant mortality rate, and family planning. Sustainable development of the fragile ecosystem and mountain development, as envisaged in Chapter 13 of Agenda 21, are also important to our development planning.

There is today a unique consensus that extreme poverty and highly wasteful consumption patterns are both mortal enemies of sustainable development. My delegation fully shares the views expressed during this debate that the road from Rio will be even more arduous than the road to Rio. With this debate, we have embarked on that road. With so much at stake, we cannot afford to falter.

Mr. LEGWAILA (Botswana): Two-thirds of Botswana's land area is covered with the thick sand layers of the Kgalagadi Desert. The country is largely arid and semi-arid; it is also prone to cyclical drought. This situation is of course not unique to Botswana. Southern Africa is currently facing a devastating drought, and the African region in general has to deal with the problems of serious drought and desertification. These problems require resources and technology. We are therefore pleased that consensus was reached in Rio on the establishment of an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) to work on a convention to combat desertification, particularly in Africa. We are also delighted that several delegations from the industrialized countries have expressed their support for the establishment of the INC. We look forward to contributing to the elaboration of the proposed convention.

(Mr. Legwaila, Botswana)

The establishment of the Commission on Sustainable Development will be the major foundation upon which implementation of the decisions reached in Rio can be built. The Group of 77, of which Botswana is a member, has already circulated a document outlining its position on the functions and structure of the Commission. It must be pointed out that, for the Commission to attract high-level participation, careful attention should be paid to its working methods. Recent dialogue involving high-level and coordination segments of the Economic and Social Council is a very important element in the process of restructuring and revitalization. We should avoid at all costs sessions that entail prolonged debates without the possibility of dialogue. It is only in situations where Ministers can have an influence on policy matters that the Commission can hope to attract their attendance.

The Chairman of the Group of 77 has already made a statement on this agenda item. Botswana associates itself with the comments he made.

(Mr. Legwaila, Botswana)

In Rio world leaders discharged their historic duty to humanity and our planet Earth when they adopted the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 and signed the Conventions on climate change and biodiversity. It was a long and arduous process but one that all of us can look back at with admiration and get inspiration and the courage to move forward. Rio was only the beginning, and the actual work has just gotten under way.

The outcome of the Rio Conference was a practical manifestation of how the United Nations can be effectively put to the service of the peoples of the world. It was also a demonstration of the dedication and commitment of our Secretary-General in ensuring that the capacity and potential of this Organization are tapped.

The current session of the General Assembly has a heavy responsibility before it. A number of decisions have to be taken as a follow-up to the Rio Conference. But there is an even bigger responsibility facing us: the need for all to honour their commitments to implement Agenda 21. This is a very crucial element of the implementation and follow-up process. We wish to express the hope that the spirit of partnership and common but differentiated responsibility will prevail.

I speak as the representative of a country that adopted a national conservation strategy last year, after extensive country-wide consultations lasting over a period of four years, as democracies normally proceed. The strategy is aimed at ensuring that development and environmental concerns go hand in hand through more coordinated and sharply focused programmes. In many developing countries households that are very poor have a very short planning horizon.

(Mr. Legwaila, Botswana)

Long-term sustainability plays a minor role in decisions about production and consumption. The national conservation strategy, therefore, provides for the use of economic incentives to stimulate sustainable development and for disincentives to discourage over-utilization of natural resources. This a very difficult task, but one that is deeply rooted in principle 1 of the Rio Declaration:

> "Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature." (A/CONF.151/26 (vol. I), p. 8).

International cooperation is a very critical element in this process and we hope we can count on the support and assistance of the international community.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate Botswana's commitment to the spirit of Rio and to our determination to do our part to contribute to a world which is environmentally friendly.

Mr. VAN LIEROP (Vanuatu): I have the honour of speaking today on behalf of the member States of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS).

Many speakers in this debate have remarked on the historic significance of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro this past June. We concur that the Earth Summit was perhaps the most significant and most timely gathering of world leaders ever known to mankind. We shall not repeat what has already been said by others in that respect. However, it should be noted that, for us, one of the most significant aspects of the process that led us to Rio de Janeiro is the fact that small island and low-lying coastal developing countries, and our concerns, were very much an integral part of the entire process.

(Mr. Van Lierop, Vanuatu)

In the past, this has not always been the case. It is a well-known fact that it has not always been easy for small island developing countries to be heard, and for their concerns to be so prominently considered by the international community. However, during the preparatory process for UNCED, and at the Conference itself, the situation was considerably different. For this, we are very thankful.

We appreciate the sensitivity, the solidarity and the support of our developing-country colleagues in the Group of 77. We also thank the developed countries for this willingness to hear our voices and respond to our concerns. We thank the members of the various secretariats, the non- governmental organizations, and the news media for their contributions in this regard as well.

Another significant aspect of the entire process was the extensive involvement of, and the many positive contributions made by, members of the community of non-governmental organizations. Never before have so many of them, from the North and the South, including those representing women, youth and indigenous peoples, been able to participate in such a vital intergovernmental process. In our view, the UNCED process benefited significantly from the participation of the non-governmental organizations, and we should ensure their continued engagement with us in that process in whatever post-UNCED institutional arrangements we devise.

We have listened most attentively to every delegation throughtout this debate. We have also read, re-read, and then read again the various statements that have been made in the course of the debate. In doing so, we have been very much encouraged by both the substance and the tone of what has been said.

(Mr. Van Lierop, Vanuatu)

We shall not repeat much of what has already been said by others as time is short, and this is more a time for deeds rather than words. In addition, the Secretary-General for Foreign Affairs of Pakistan has already spoken on behalf of the Group of 77, and we, of course, fully associate ourselves with that statement. However, there are a few brief points we wish to emphasize.

We welcome the very thorough report of the Secretary-General and his thought-provoking ideas on the follow-up of UNCED. These deserve our very careful consideration. In particular, we agree with him that:

> "The challenge after Rio is to maintain the momentum of commitment to sustainable development, to transform it into policies and practice, and to give it effective and coordinated institutional support." (A/47/PV.52, p. 4-5)

We also concur with the Secretary-General's pointed observation on the meaning of sustainable development to the effect that

> "Economic growth is the mainspring of development, but its thrust must be guided by equity, justice and social and ecological responsibility if development is to endure." (A/47/PV.52, p. 6)

Thus, as others have remarked, the establishment of the Commission on Sustainable Development will be an important cornerstone of our efforts to continue the momentum generated in Rio by UNCED. In our view, very careful attention must be paid to the structure and composition of the Commission and to its headquarters.

We desire to see a strong amd effective Commission with an independent and clearly identifiable secretariat that will work full time on sustainable development issues. In our view, the implementation of Agenda 21 requires the creation of a high-level Commission on Sustainable Development serviced by a high-level secretariat with substantive capacity and adequate resources. We

(Mr. Van Lierop, Vanuatu)

also believe it to be very important that the Head of that secretariat report directly to the Secretary-General.

Furthermore, we agree that the Commission should meet at the ministerial level, at least once a year. We also support the idea of a high-level advisory body on sustainable development.

Where the Commission meets and where its secretariat is located are also important. Any number of cities could quite adequately host meetings of the Commission and house its secretariat. Any number of cities, we are certain, would be quite pleased to do so. However, our foremost consideration in making decisions of this nature should always be the efficiency and accessibility of both the Commission and its secretariat. The accessibility of the Commission and its secretariat could, we believe, have considerable bearing on its effectiveness and on how the Commission is perceived in the developing world. For these reasons, we believe the most logical site for the Commission to meet and for the secretariat to be located is New York, where most countries, particularly the least developed and the small island developing countries, are represented.

(Mr. Van Lierop, Vanuatu)

We share the concern of those who do not wish to see the Commission on Sustainable Development "subverted" or "emasculated" in any fashion. Make no mistake about it: we too want a strong, autonomous and effective Commission. Some friends have suggested to us that this is a reason not to have the Commission's secretariat located in New York. We have even been told that locating the secretariat outside New York would ensure its independence and its effectiveness.

However, our own experience teaches us that being located some distance from a centre of economic and political power does not necessarily guarantee independence of thought or action. We would prefer to strengthen the autonomy and effectiveness of the Commission by more direct structural means - means such as giving the Commission a forward-looking mandate and authorizing it to adopt and revise its own rules of procedure; integrating non-governmental organizations into its work; and arranging for it not to be within any other Department at United Nations Headquarters.

We prefer New York simply to ensure maximum accessibility to the greatest number of countries. We do not want our participation, or that of any other developing country, to be primarily symbolic in nature. We expect to be active participants in the substantive work of the Commission and will need to marshall our limited human and material resources very effectively in order to achieve that end.

There are important aspects of our post-UNCED work besides the establishment of the Commission on Sustainable Development. We are highly encouraged by the promising prospects of Capacity 21 and other components of this process.

(Mr. Van Lierop, Vanuatu)

We are also very pleased at the positive reactions we have heard with regard to the proposal to convene a global conference on sustainable development of small island States. It is our hope that this conference will help to produce very concrete and tangible results. We are willing to invest considerable time and effort to ensure that this is the case.

In a similar vein, we intend to be active participants in the intergovernmental negotiating committee for a convention on drought and desertification that will be established during the current session of the General Assembly. The threat posed by drought and desertification is certainly one of mankind's greatest challenges.

Turning to the two Conventions that were opened for signature in Rio, we see much that must be done to follow through on what was agreed to. We are proud that Mauritius - a member of the Association of Small Island States (AOSIS) - was the first country to ratify the Framework Convention on Climate Change. Seychelles and the Marshall Islands - two other AOSIS member countries - were next to ratify, and then the United States. Subsequently the Maldives ratified, and Vanuatu will do so this month. Other AOSIS countries are also in the process of ratification.

That is the good news. The bad news is that we really do not have a moment to spare. Recent scientific evidence suggests that the dangers of global warming and the attendant sea-level rise, coral bleaching and increased frequency and intensity of tropical storms may have been seriously underestimated. We now know that there is sufficient political will to address this problem. We pray that there is still sufficient time.

(Mr. Van Lierop, Vanuatu)

In a sense, the process we are now engaged in can be equated to the running of a marathon race. This is a race to ensure that our planet will continue to be able to sustain life as we know it. We can win this race only if all of us are willing to look to the future and work together to ensure that the life-sustaining resources of the planet are respected, preserved, equitably shared and placed at the disposal of all peoples. We equate this race to a marathon because it is a long-term process and not a short-term event similar to a sprint.

The preparatory process in which all of us participated prior to Rio can be compared to the lengthy period of training that one undergoes in preparation for running a marathon. That training brings the runner to the starting-line bereft of excess weight, well conditioned and full of anticipation. Rio de Janeiro was our starting-line, and the Earth Summit was actually the starting signal. The race to save our planet for all of its present inhabitants and for future generations has now begun.

The cheers we heard at the starting-line back in June in Rio have receded into the background. We are now entering a more difficult phase of the marathon - one in which it is critically important to maintain our momentum and our focus. What lies ahead are many hills - some steeper than others - and many sudden and unexpected turns. There will also be a few valleys. During the race our endurance and our perseverance will be severely tested. Muscles will ache, lungs will gasp for air, and our limbs will struggle to work in unison.

Just as the many long hours of training serve a marathon runner well and provide a reservoir of strength when he or she draws near the finishing line,

(Mr. Van Lierop, Vanuatu)

so will the long months of preparation for the UNCED serve us well and provide a reservoir of goodwill to draw upon when we enter the critical stages of our own race. Each step we take, no matter how small it may seem, will draw us closer to our objective.

Of course, ours is a race that cannot be won by any individual country or group of countries. Ours is a race for the future of all mankind. Thus, it is a race that none of us can win alone. It is a race that can only be won by all of us together - large and small, rich and poor, North and South. Otherwise it cannot be won at all.

Mr. TURK (Slovenia): In this discussion of the central issue of mankind's future it is appropriate to recall that the awareness of the centrality of ecological considerations within the broader framework of development emerged not instantaneously but, rather, as a result of decades of experience and thought. Let me mention just a few of the milestones in that process: the report of the Club of Rome entitled "Limits of Growth", the 1972 Stocholm Conference on the Human Environment, the work of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the consideration of environmental questions in the context of the Conference on the Law of the Sea and, above all, the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, entitled "Our Common Future", which was published five years ago. All these achievements contributed to the creation of the awareness necessary to the convening and successful conclusion of the Conference on Environment and Development that was held earlier this year in Rio de Janeiro.

(Mr. Türk, Slovenia)

The Rio Conference accepted the concept of sustainable development - a concept originated by the World Commission on Environment and Development. Moreover, the Rio Conference made the concept of sustainable development one of the main issues on the current international agenda. It is therefore natural to emphasize that, following the Rio Conference, the concept of sustainable development can no longer be regarded as a terminological or conceptual innovation. The adoption of the Rio Declaration, Agenda 21 and the principles on forests, and the signing of the Conventions on climate change and biological diversity represent practical achievements that have translated the concept of sustainable development into a comprehensive international programme of action.

In addition to these achievements at the international level, it is important to keep in mind that environmental considerations have gained unprecented public support and that environmental movements now represent a major vehicle of change in many countries the world over. In my country, Slovenia, which is currently going through a profound process of transition, the so-called Green popular movement represented, and continues to represent, one of the main engines of change. This is by no means surprising since at this point in history real change requires a thorough review of the relationship between ecological and economic aspects of development. The basic premise here is that it is absolutely necessary to integrate concerns of environment and development into all relevant economic, social and political policies.

(Mr. Türk, Slovenia)

The Rio Summit represented the final stage of the maturation of these basic premises and a point of departure for a comprehenesive process of implementation of the documents adopted by the Summit. It is now essential that the process of implementation be properly developed and that it take place at all levels - I emphasize "all": local, national, regional and international. Each Government has a historic responsibility today to assist in generating public awareness of the need for sustained action and to provide real incentives which will support implementation of the documents adopted at the world Conference on Environment and Development.

The Government of Slovenia is fully aware of the importance of these tasks. Slovenia participated in the Rio Conference with a clear determination to develop and pursue policies required by Agenda 21 and other documents adopted at the Conference. On 1 October 1992, about a month ago, the Government of Slovenia submitted to the Parliament a draft law on protection of the environment. It is a comprehensive legal and policy instrument designed to support the concept of sustainable development in the economic and social transformation process currently under way in Slovenia. The basic premise of the draft law is that the costs of preserving the environment must be accepted in all economic and other relevant decisions.

Restructuring and, where necessary, the abolition of obsolete technologies and modes of production are necessary in this context. It is important to understand that from this perspective the concurrent process of privatization also represents an important opportunity, provided that environmentally sound and and environmentally friendly investments benefit from an appropriate system of incentives. Furthermore, protection of the environment also presents an important opportunity for investment in

(Mr. Türk, Slovenia)

technologies and businesses which were hitherto undeveloped or even unknown, and which themselves can give rise to new patterns of development.

Proceeding from this basic premise, the draft law enunciates a series of principles which are further developed to the level of specific norms and policy orientations. I shall not quote all the principles but shall mention just two. The principle of having a prior environment impact assessment in all new economic projects is part of the law now before Parliament. The principle of actio popularis, which gives every citizen the means to bring all violations of law before a competent court of law, illustrates the nature of the draft law now before the Parliament of Slovenia.

In referring to these principles we are, of course, fully aware that laws provide only the framework for actual practice and that their enforcement in this domain remains a matter of considerable complexity. Nevertheless, we are convinced that the draft law on the protection of the environment represents for Slovenia an important step in implementing the decisions adopted at the Earth Summit.

International cooperation is certainly one of the most important elements in implementing the decisions of the Earth Summit. Long ago the international community accepted the principle of sic utere tuo ut alienum non laedas as the basic rule governing relations between States in environmental matters. Subsequently additional norms and institutions were developed, with the aim of preventing activities harmful to the environment. However, the Rio Summit has strengthened the understanding that additional institutions and more resolute approaches towards basic problems in this domain are necessary.

(Mr. Türk, Slovenia)

Like many other countries, Slovenia enthusiastically supported the idea of creating a high-level Commission on Sustainable Development, which would, in the words of the pertinent document:

> "ensure the effective follow-up of the Conference, as well as ... enhance international cooperation and rationalize the intergovernmental decision-making capacity for the integration of environment and development issues and ... examine the progress in the implementation of Agenda 21 at the national, regional and international levels".
>
> (A/CONF.151/26 (Vol. III), para. 38.11)

Slovenia generally agrees with the proposals contained in paragraphs 10 to 31 of the Secretary-General's report (A/47/598) concerning procedural and organizational modalities for the Commission on Sustainable Development. We wish, however, to emphasize the following four points pertaining to the organizational procedures to be followed by the Commission.

First, the Commission should organize its work in a manner which will provide an effective and businesslike process of discussion leading to immediate action. Secondly, in order to achieve this, the Commission should establish new and imaginative methods of effective participation by non-governmental organizations, in particular those that have already gained credibility in efforts to protect the environment. Thirdly, the Commission should find the most appropriate way of ensuring meaningful participation by international financial institutions and development banks in its deliberations. This is essential for the real integration of environmental and development concerns in development financing and other aspects of actual practice. Fourthly, the Commision should develop an appropriate level of

(Mr. Türk, Slovenia)

independence from, and cooperation with, other United Nations organs, in particular the Economic and Social Council, and it should be assisted by a highly specialized and effective secretariat. None of these tasks are easy, and all of them will require a great deal of effort in the months to come.

My last point is perhaps the most crucial. The process of implementing Agenda 21 will require appropriate and sustained financing. In the developed countries an awareness of the need to accept the costs of environmental protection seems to have gained general support. Now it is necessary to ensure that the same general support is given to the idea that a substantial increase in official development assistance to the developing countries is needed, and in particular that the least developed countries should benefit most from such increased assistance. This is vital if Agenda 21 is to become a real programme for implementing the historic changes necesssary at the end of this century. The processes initiated in Rio will be demanding and will require time to bring about the necessary results. It is therefore particularly important that the right and resolute steps be taken today.

Mr. AYALA LASSO (Ecuador): In his important statement on 2 November, the Secretary-General for Foreign Affairs of Pakistan presented the views of the Group of 77 on the subject before us. My delegation would like to reiterate its support for those views.

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development is increasingly being recognized as a landmark in the history of international relations. It was the response by the community of nations to basic anxieties about the future of our planet, home of the human race, of which we are all equal members. The Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 are no longer merely the

(Mr. Ayala Lasso, Ecuador)

goals set by our peoples to guide our future actions, but are also a commitment to be honoured if we wish the future to provide coming generations with the benefits of peace, freedom and justice.

(Mr. Ayala Lasso, Ecuador)

The Rio Conference served to set in train a set of ideas and concepts based on the recognition of growing interdependence amongst all countries. The physical reality of our planet has prompted observers to note that what people do and what they fail to do anywhere on Earth has consequences everywhere. We depend, therefore, on one another and in this sense we have the ineluctable obligation to act in line with a coordinated vision, one that will ensure the preservation and the future of our planet. We might say that interdependence highlights our common obligation to protect our environment.

However, there is a second indispensable facet to this analysis that was stressed at the Rio Conference. I refer to development.

If interdependence indeed brings us face to face with the need to protect the environment, solidarity must prompt us to ensure the development of all at a pace such that the enormous gaps now existing can be eliminated or substantially narrowed relatively soon.

Solidarity is the ethical response of the international community to what justice demands, something that has been put off time after time for the vast majority of people. What is still lacking is that all countries, especially those in the developed world, have not become just as aware of the content and scope of the obligations that solidarity imposes upon them in ethical terms as they are of all the obligations that the concept of interdependence imposes upon them.

It is from this perspective that the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 must be judged.

We fully agree with the idea that we have to move towards development that will be sustainable, socially equitable and ecologically balanced.

(Mr. Ayala Lasso, Ecuador)

Within these parameters it is up to each State to exercise with wisdom the right to determine its own policies and to manage responsibly its natural resources.

An environmental conscience has developed because, in large part, we are eye witnesses to the deterioration of our planet. It is a matter of urgency, therefore, that sufficient resources be provided for undoing the damage done, for reorienting policies and, above all, for enabling developing countries to enjoy the use on concessionary terms of fresh resources allowing them to live up to the obligation to further their national development.

Financing and transferring technology are, therefore, indispensable expressions of international solidarity.

A number of speakers from this rostrum have referred to the need for the industrialized countries to open their economies and to eliminate all forms of protectionism if they are truly ready to play the role that is properly theirs in the community of nations.

I should like to recall that Ecuador, on behalf of the eight countries members of the Treaty on Amazonian Cooperation has proposed establishing a $2 billion fund for managing and conserving protected areas in the Amazon basin in such a way as to balance the rights and interests of the countries of the region with the concerns of the international community as regards the protection and efficient management of the Amazon ecosystems.

Agenda 21 is a pragmatic instrument, a programme of action operating on three levels.

In the economic and social sphere, the Agenda is geared towards fighting poverty, changing current consumption patterns and resolving all the problems tied to demographic dynamics.

(Mr. Ayala Lasso, Ecuador)

As far as resources are concerned, the Agenda is geared towards their rational use and conservation. The protection of forests, the fight against desertification, and the care of ecosystems must be coordinated harmoniously with the agricultural needs of the people and a permanent supply of healthy food sufficient for all.

As to financial needs, Agenda 21 emphasizes the orientation of science and the adaptation of policies towards sustainable development for all. The developed countries, which are the major originators of the deterioration of the environment, must contribute in a timely and sufficient way for Agenda 21 to have a chance fully to become a reality.

Ecuador is pleased at the establishment of the Commission on Sustainable Development, whose work will be of growing importance. The dynamic participation of all countries at the highest possible level will make the work of the Commission more fruitful. Its mandate must be broad and flexible, so as to meet the requirements that are embodied in the implementation of Agenda 21, and it must be adapted to changes as they emerge around the world.

The participation of non-governmental organizations, which proved so useful in Rio de Janeiro, will go on increasing in the future. We need the closest possible coordination between those organizations and the Commission on Sustainable Development to ensure that the work of the Commission will be effective.

In Rio de Janeiro Ecuador signed the Declaration on Environment and Development, the statement on forests principles, the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity. Ecuador is taking a series of steps aimed at enacting the commitments we made to the community of nations and to our own people.

(Mr. Ayala Lasso, Ecuador)

Decisions have been adopted for managing Ecuador's vast resources in the Amazon region within the context of respect for the ecology and with the direct participation of the indigenous people. By the same token, Ecuador is of the view that exploiting the seas and their resources within and beyond the areas of national sovereignty or jurisdiction must be carried out from an appropriate perspective of sustainable development.

In conclusion, I should like to state that Ecuador believes that the reasonable exercise of the right to development very definitely entails the obligation to look out for the future of nature, that is, of the environment. That is the very essence of sustainable development and, moreover, implies the obligation to pursue the common well-being of the human race, ensuring for all, with a spirit of solidarity, equitable levels of well-being and of progress. When we have all understood that, and adjusted our policies to that thinking, the world will have embarked upon a path that will lead it towards development and justice.

Mrs. AGGREY-ORLEANS (Ghana): Allow me at the outset to express my delegation's sincere appreciation to the Secretary-General for the report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, as well as for the lucid and stimulating report on the institutional arrangements to follow up the Conference. We found them most useful in their analysis and assessment of the outcome of the Rio Conference and in the challenge of a reinforced vision of global solidarity and cooperation which emanates from them.

(Mrs. Aggrey-Orleans, Ghana)

My delegation must also take this opportunity to express again to the Government and people of Brazil our deep appreciation of the warmth of the hospitality which they extended to us and the excellent facilities placed at our disposal for the Conference.

My delegation endorses the statement made by the Secretary-General for Foreign Affairs of Pakistan on behalf of the Group of 77 at the beginning of our debate.

The Rio Conference was an epoch-making event. Not only was the Summit the culmination of three and a half years of careful and arduous negotiations, but it also marked the acceptance by the international community of the inescapable and symbiotic link between environment and development. For centuries man's efforts at progress and development have been perceived within the narrow concept of the application of scientific and technological achievement to production, distribution and consumption. This restrictive concept of development which discounts the delicate balance between man and nature has been found to be not only flawed but also unsustainable. As so poignantly noted by the Jakarta Message of the Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement: "Rapid degradation of the environment threatens the very survival of humankind".

The acceptance of the need for collective action for sustainable development and the momentum of that acceptance should not be allowed to wane. At Rio the international community achieved a number of important and far-reaching agreements. We approved the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, which embodies principles underlying our common concern for survival as a species. These 27 principles define the new partnership which the global consensus on the inextricable link between environment and development has forged among developed and developing countries in our pursuit

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of the purposes of the Charter of the United Nations, notably the achievement of international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character. We also endorsed Agenda 21, which is expected to guide all of us, at the global, regional and national levels, in the formulation of developmental policies. The Authoritative Statement of Principles designed to guide our management and use of national forests was also adopted to promote sustainable development and to address the needs of the environment. Separate but not unrelated to these agreements were the two international Conventions - the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity - which were opened for signature at the Rio Conference. These Conventions confer on all of us obligations and rights within a new global environmental regime which guarantees the development of all States.

The General Assembly at its forty-seventh session now has the challenging and onerous task of translating into reality the agreements and recommendations reached at Rio. The Assembly will take important decisions regarding the establishment of the necessary institutional arrangements for the implementation of the programme of action contained in Agenda 21. In this regard, the Ghana delegation views the creation of the high-level Commission on Sustainable Development as a matter of fundamental and central importance. In accordance with the cherished principles of openness, transparency and equitable geographical distribution, Ghana believes that the membership of the Commission should not be restricted to the few, but should reflect broad representation, similar to the composition of the Economic and Social Council. And my delegation agrees with the Secretary-General's proposal that the Commission should be established as a high-level forum for the

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comprehensive and in-depth consideration of all aspects of the follow-up to the Conference and should, therefore, be entrusted with the broad functions and powers needed to fulfil such a mandate.

For the Commission to be efficient and effective, it must have appropriate and adequate secretariat support services. In this regard, we note the intention of the Secretary-General that such services should be distinctly organized within the first cluster of functions at United Nations Headquarters. Such distinct support would eliminate the risk of diffused support, and would be indispensable to the fulfilment of the mandate of the Commission.

As we consider the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), the relentless damage to certain parts of our planet continues. In Africa, in particular, hundreds of lives are lost daily in the carnage caused by severe drought and desertification, which threatens the socio-economic life and survival of the continent. Areas which hitherto had experienced neither drought nor desertification have now been engulfed by these phenomena, with irreparable damage to flora and fauna. Millions of people are uprooted in the process, creating mass poverty and inflicting disease, hunger, malnutrition and misery. In the face of the fragile economies of the continent, these phenomena have intensified social strife and aggravated the economic deprivation of our peoples. The vulnerable groups, including women, children and the aged, may be further marginalized. The consequence is that more pressure is brought to bear on the environment, leading to its accelerated degradation. It is for that reason that my delegation views as one of the most remarkable achievements of the Rio Conference the inextricable interconnection established in Agenda 21 between

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sustainable development and poverty eradication. The phenomena of drought and desertification call for urgent and serious discussion which should lead to the early creation of the intergovernmental negotiating machinery to be charged with the preparation of an international convention to combat drought and desertification. It is our ardent hope that such a convention will be ready for adoption by 1994.

The active contribution of women to the UNCED process is a tribute to the capacity of women to bring about change. It culminated in the elaboration and inclusion of chapter 24 of the programme of action contained in Agenda 21, which clearly places men and women on an equal footing. The momentum generated by this achievement should be reinforced through the full participation of women in the decision-making process and in the implementation of progrmmes and projects under Agenda 21. We are convinced that under the various institutional arrangements due account will be taken of the need for gender balance.

The greater awareness and consciousness which have been created in addressing environmental and developmental issues requires, in our view, a new orientation of development assistance. While we commend the efforts of those developed countries that have achieved the target of 0.7 per cent of their gross national product as official development assistance, the enormous responsibilities and obligations to be met under Agenda 21 call for additional resources.

We therefore wish earnestly to appeal to those who have achieved the target to give thorough consideration to going beyond it. We appeal with equal earnestness to the others who have not yet attained the target to strive to achieve it. In this regard, the peace dividend could play an important

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role. The urgent need for adequate financial resources to implement Agenda 21 must be addressed. Swift and prompt action should be taken to fulfil the commitments undertaken at Rio. We observe that the call for resources to meet the programmes and projects under Agenda 21 has not received an adequate response. Furthermore, it is a matter of deep concern to my delegation that the successful implementation of Capacity 21 by the United Nations Development Programme has been thrown into question. Out of the $100 million required to bring the Fund into operation by the end of this year, only $8 million has so far been contributed. We urge the international community, particularly the developed countries, to demonstrate their commitment to the survival of our planet by endeavouring to meet the target.

Our quest for solutions aimed at addressing environmental problems should not provide a pretext for imposing on developing countries additional conditionalities through the policies of multilateral and financial institutions. The programme of action contained in Agenda 21 inspires new approaches to international cooperation, which have no place for such conditionalities.

(Mrs. Aggrey-Orleans, Ghana)

A favourable international environment is indispensable to the achievement of the goals and objectives of sustainable development. Developing countries must be fully integrated into a system of fair and just international economic relations. In our interdependent world any distortions in the international economic system, particularly through the unprecedented fall in commodity prices, and tariff and non-tariff barriers, have a devastating impact on countries with fragile economies. That is why Ghana shares the view expressed in the report of the Conference that an open, equitable, non-discriminatory and predictable multilateral system, in which commodity exports of developing countries can find markets at fair prices, free of tariff and non-tariff barriers, is the prerequisite for sustainable development. The differences between the developed countries, which have plagued the Uruguay Round for so long, therefore call for urgent settlement. A trade war would not only undermine the multilateral trading system, in which all of us have an interest, but would also be in disharmony with the atmosphere of cooperation which has emerged following the ending of the cold war.

The world cannot pursue the maintenance of the purity of the environment at the expense of development, which lies at the root of survival. Nor can it continue to pursue development which ultimately will result in its own suicide on account of unrestrained degradation of the environment. But poverty could justify almost anything. In addition to the inadequate financial resources of developing countries, the absence of technology constitutes a serious drawback in our efforts to pursue development which recognizes the need to protect the environment. It is not merely a question of bridging the gap between the

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developed North and the developing South. It is principally a question of common survival.

The transfer of environmentally sound technology, on a concessional and non-commercial basis, is therefore of crucial importance to the developing countries. For this reason my delegation is of the considered opinion that in addition to regularly reviewing and monitoring the activities of various financing sources and mechanisms and ensuring an effective link between the availability and maximization of new and additional financial resources, the Commission on Sustainable Development should also review and monitor the modalities for the transfer of environmentally friendly technology to developing countries.

The UNCED process not only emphasizes our interdependence, but also symbolizes the new hopes which have been kindled for building a just, equitable and secure international order. The real test will be whether the UNCED process makes any difference to the quality of life of millions of people, especially in the developing countries. The international community has the capacity to bring about that difference by ensuring that the outcome of UNCED does not remain a dream. It behoves us all to summon the necessary will and courage to meet that challenge.

Ms. ARYSTANBEKOVA (Kazakhstan) (interpretation from Russian): The current discussion of the report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development is marked by the deep concern of the international community over the situation with regard to these urgent global problems, which are worrying the whole of mankind. In my view, this discussion is also marked by a new feeling which the Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros-Ghali, has

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called "the spirit of Rio", describing it as coherence, planet-wide development and responsibility.

On behalf of the delegation of Kazakhstan, I should like to express gratitude to the Secretary-General and to the Rapporteur-General, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Algeria, for the reports. I should also like to take this opportunity to convey our gratitude to the Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr. Maurice Strong, for its final documents and to the Government of Brazil for its excellent organization.

Kazakhstan was taking part for the first time in the work associated with the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development when it was held in the summer in Rio de Janeiro. We wholeheartedly support the conclusion in Principle 25 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development that:

> "Peace, development and environmental protection are interdependent and indivisible."

This idea was expressed in his address to the General Assembly at its current session by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Mr. Nursultan Nazarbaev, who made concrete proposals for strengthening peace and international security and enhancing the role of the United Nations in the new circumstances, which call for a new, one-world agenda.

Our Head of State emphasized that preventive diplomacy constituted a system of political and socio-economic measures designed to prevent the outbreak of potential tension. In this regard, he identified as a potential source of tension in the twenty-first century, among other problems that give rise to deep concern, the problem of water in the Central Asian region, which in the course of time could become the source of dangerous differences in the

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very heartland of this ancient continent. In this regard, there is already an urgent need for special United Nations projects to provide for an effective step-by-step solution to the problem of securing the water resources of Central Asia.

The vital question of protecting the environment boils down in the case of Kazakhstan to two words - Aral and Semipalatinsk. Unfortunately, our people are experiencing at first hand what an ecological catastrophe means. The Aral Sea, which is drying up, is an ecological disaster zone calling for urgent and large-scale international assistance. Serious mistakes in the economic policy of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics has created a situation in which the waters from the rivers feeding the Aral Sea - the Amu-Dar'ya and the Syr-Dar'ya - have been entirely drawn off for the purposes of irrigation, and the sea now lacks any inflow. Over the last 30 years the level of the Aral Sea has fallen by 17 metres and its volume of water has fallen by 70 per cent, while there has been an almost threefold increase in its salinity. What was formerly a region rich in flora and fauna has become a desert. From the exposed sea floor the wind has blown off millions of tons of salt, which have poisoned the earth and the air well beyond the confines of Kazakhstan.

Another of our ecological wounds is the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site, which was built on Kazakh soil against the will of our people. The total yield of the 467 explosions conducted over the last 40 years in the atmosphere, on the ground and underground has been hundreds of times that of the devices which destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. More than half a million people have suffered from these explosions. Last August President Nazarbaev issued a decree closing down the lethal test site, but tremendous sums of

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money are needed to clean up the region, treat the victims and ensure the safety of newborn children. The people of Kazakhstan need active international support.

I should like to emphasize that the problems of our own Semipalatinsk have social and economic aspects as well as the purely ecological aspects. Among them are problems of motherhood, childhood, high infant mortality and low standards of living. The drying up of the Aral Sea has threatened the very basis of the existence of a whole generation of people for whom the sea was a way of life.

(Ms. Arystanbekova, Kazakhstan)

From this important rostrum in the General Assembly, the President of Kazakhstan expressed his gratitude to the leadership of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) for creating a project to assist in producing a plan to preserve the Aral Sea and for convening a group of experts that has proposed declaring the Aral coastal area a world-scale ecological disaster zone. We are also grateful to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for its cooperation in providing humanitarian assistance to mothers and children of the Aral Sea coastal area and Semipalatinsk.

The international community is facing the problem of ensuring sustainable development and creating favourable conditions for the life of future generations. In keeping with the growing awareness of our common responsibility for the fate of the planet, we need to devise effective machinery for implementing the decisions taken in the realm of protecting the environment and development. In this regard, Kazakhstan supports the founding of the high-level Commission on Sustainable Development, for a comprehensive, in-depth consideration of all aspects of follow-up to the Conference, and states its interest in playing an active part in the Commission.

The delegation of Kazakhstan wholeheartedly shares the conclusions in the Secretary-General's report, whose chief aim is to attach the highest priority to matters related to the preservation of the environment and social and economic development viewed from their dialectical interrelationship. We fully support the idea, stated in the preamble to Agenda 21, that the problems facing mankind, in the interests of sustainable development, can be solved only by concerted efforts in a global partnership. As a newly independent State which is grappling with the difficult tasks of transition, and for which

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ecological problems are very concrete, Kazakhstan is ready to provide the broadest and most constructive cooperation possible in the realm of environmental protection and development.

Mr. MUMBENGEGWI (Zimbabwe): My delegation joins earlier speakers in commending our Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, for the dynamic manner in which he has conducted the affairs of our Organization since taking office last January. In the context of the present debate, his well-considered report (A/47/598), "Institutional arrangements to follow up the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development", and his thoughtful opening statement in this debate last Monday provide a clear and credible pointer to the way forward.

I should also like to take this opportunity to express my delegation's appreciation to Mr. Maurice Strong and his secretariat for their sterling performance, both in the preparatory stages and during the Earth Summit itself. Our thanks are also due to Ambassador Tommy Koh of Singapore, whose indomitable spirit and firm leadership guided the work of the Preparatory Committee as well as the main committee for the Summit itself.

I also take this opportunity to express our profound gratitude to the Government and people of Brazil for providing the outstanding arrangements that made it possible for the largest international conference ever held to reach such momentous decisions relating to the survival of our planet Earth.

It is now some five months since the closing of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro. The fact that well over a hundred heads of State or Government took the time to participate clearly indicates that the fate of our planet was treated with the seriousness that it deserves.

(Mr. Mumbengegwi, Zimbabwe)

In our view, the most far-reaching outcome of the Summit was the adoption by consensus of the comprehensive plan of action called Agenda 21, which stands as a guide to sustainable development for policies of Governments and the international community for the remainder of this century and well into the twenty-first. This is in no way to diminish the significance of the adoption of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development or of the Non-Legally Binding Authoritative Statement of Principles for a Global Consensus on the Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of All Types of Forests and the opening for signature of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change - which Zimbabwe has now signed and ratified - and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The decision taken by the General Assembly in 1989 to call the Rio Earth Summit represented a correct judgement that existing patterns of international cooperation were not adequate to meet all developmental and environmental challenges. The fact that the Rio Summit was a Conference on both environment and development was significant recognition of a new consensus that these two issues could no longer be treated as separate subjects. Indeed, the alleviation of poverty in poor countries and changes in consumption and production patterns in rich countries are now inextricably linked to the environmental agenda.

The purpose of Agenda 21 is very clear. It is to forge a global partnership in sustainable development, which was defined by the 1987 Brundtland World Commission on Environment and Development as development that

> "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". (A/42/427, annex, chap. 2, para. 1)

(Mr. Mumbengegwi, Zimbabwe)

Whether this global partnership comes to fruition or not is very much dependent upon two essential ingredients: first, the political will to implement the Agenda 21 action plan; and, secondly, the setting up of adequate mechanisms to implement and follow up the action plan. These two essential ingredients must be present at both the national and international levels if Agenda 21 is to escape the fate of many plans before it: lying on the shelf in both national and international institutions gathering dust.

(Mr. Mumbengegwi, Zimbabwe)

Central to the notion of global partnership for sustained development is the question of mobilizing the necessary resources and making the necessary institutional arrangement. There can be no doubt that all countries have to readjust their budgets as well as their priorities if the implementation of the plan of action in Agenda 21 is to be a success. However, a clear, underlying premise of the Rio Summit was that if the developing countries were to carry out the obligations under Agenda 21, they must be assisted in finding a sufficient amount of external resources. These resources could be made available in a variety of ways. Attention is usually turned to official development assistance, but there are other ways which could be even more effective. These include greater access to markets, improved terms of trade, debt relief, private investment and, of course, technology transfer.

On the question of institutional arrangements, the Secretary-General, in his report, has made very practical proposals relating to the setting up and functioning of the Commission on Sustainable Development. My delegation finds itself in large agreement with the proposals he has made. The main danger to be avoided is the duplication of tasks between the various organs, all of which clearly have roles to play in the implementation of the plan of action in Agenda 21.

The PRESIDENT: In accordance with the decision taken by the General Assembly at its 52nd plenary meeting, on 2 November 1992, I now call on the Observer of the Holy See.

Archbishop MARTINO (Holy See): A few short months ago the eyes of the world were focused on Rio de Janeiro, where the representatives of the countries of the world solemnly stated their commitment to seeking and implementing ways of reconciling the imperative duty of care and protection of the environment with the fundamental right of all peoples to development.

Even before we consider the results achieved in Rio, it is most important to notice that the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) has brought about a very remarkable change of perspective. If in the past it was conceivable to speak of environment and of development separately, that is not the case any more, for the two have now been placed in a mutually reinforcing and interactive parallelism. The pressing demands for the care and protection of the environment cannot be used to deny the right to development, nor can the urgency of development be invoked to justify damage to the environment. The interrelation of environment and development presents new and formidable challenges, requiring radical changes in the attitude and conduct of individuals and nations, and it cannot be ignored.

The documents issued by UNCED - namely, the Rio Declaration, Agenda 21 and the two Conventions - do not pretend to resolve the immense problems examined at the Conference, but they provide a valid foundation for the arduous work of building a world in which environment and development will complement rather than destroy each other.

Principle 1 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development correctly identifies human beings as the central point of convergence of all the issues pertaining to environment and development. The principle of

(Archbishop Martino, Holy See)

the primacy and centrality of the human person has been consistently upheld by the Holy See, which has insisted that all ecological programmes and all developmental initiatives must respect and enhance the dignity, the rights and and the duties of all individuals affected by them

Because they are centred on the human person, the issues of environment and development are, at their root, issues of a moral, ethical nature, thus entailing rights and duties. The centrality of the human person means that the world of nature has its converging point in the human being and that development can be understood only by taking into account the total dimensions of the human being. There follow, as immediate consequences, the inherent obligations to exercise both responsible stewardship in regard to the environment and genuine solidarity with all other people in the process of development. Responsible stewardship and genuine solidarity, as grave moral obligations, fall on everyone without exception and must effectively take into consideration the rights of present as well as of future generations. Since we have inherited the environment and its resources, we have the obligation to pass it on to the next generations, possibly improved, certainly not damaged.

Everyone is aware of the difficult task that lies ahead but, hopefully, UNCED has succeeded in awakening and directing the commitment of Governments, organizations and individuals, since at stake is nothing less than the well-being - even the survival - of the inhabitants of our planet.
Since there is no world government that could compel everyone to defend our planet, there is an obvious danger of inertia. This is so because, contrary to other natural threats to our lives that can be categorized as "events" localized in space and time with an immediate impact on us, the

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environmental threat is a "trend" slow in building. Since the true magnitude of the results can be gauged only as an integrated effect over many decades, there is a clear danger of succumbing to the inertial tendency of "wait and see" or, worse yet, of letting future generations take care of the problem.

A similar danger derives from the ambiguous position so far adopted by so many. Individuals, companies and national Governments cannot continue to deplore environmental degradation on the one hand while continuing to contribute to that process on the other, as if the deterioration of the environment were somebody else's problem. It is a common and global problem, demanding real changes in individual and collective life-styles and productive systems.

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Underlying such dangers is the common assumption that an individual's choices in the matter of protecting or polluting the environment are too insignificant to affect society as a whole, in the face of the magnitude of the problems confronting the world. Yet life would become unliveable in a society where the majority of the people felt that way.

What is urgently needed is a new education in ecological responsibility that inculcates human values, such as respect for one's neighbours, love of nature and a sense of responsibility and solidarity, so that each individual will relinquish egoistic behaviour in order that communities may assume more responsible lifestyles.

At the national and international levels, sustainable development is not achieved spontaneously; society needs action, strategies and institutions to reach this goal. The problem is most clearly perceived at the world level, because of the strict ecological and economic interdependence between different geographical areas. The Holy See does not intend to offer technical and political solutions, which would go beyond its sphere of competence, but stresses that it is necessary that the ethical dimension of all national and international programmes be given due consideration.

There are, in fact, important issues of justice involved in working out equitable access to the resources and technologies needed for development and in allocating the inherent costs. There are many criteria demanding consideration - for instance, historical accountability for past activities; the current status quo; and the allocation of permits on the basis of the degree of development or of population - but none of them, taken in isolation, can provide equitable and efficient solutions.

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Conceptual and practical difficulties still abound, but adequate study and courageous action in this regard are an inescapable moral obligation.

With specific reference to the allocation of permits, the Holy See respectfully suggests that consideration be given to the question of devising means of relating these problems to the crucial issue of settling external indebtedness, thus helping countries the better to attain their rightful development while protecting and enhancing the environment.

At the Rio Conference the Holy See also invited the international community to discover and affirm the spiritual dimension of the issue at hand. If the human being is at the centre of concern in all matters pertaining to environment and development, then the total dimensions of his being must be taken into consideration. Human beings need, and have a right to, more than clean air and water and more than economic and technological progress. The reconciliation of environment and development will also offer the human spirit new expressions of its artistic and aesthetic capacities.

In conclusion, I should like to repeat these words of Pope John Paul II:

"Authentic human development can hardly ignore the solidarity which binds man and his environment, nor can it exclude a universal concern for the needs of all the Earth's peoples. Any attempt to assess the relationship between environment and development which ignores these deeper realities will inevitably lead to further and perhaps more destabilizing imbalances."

The PRESIDENT: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

(The President)

In accordance with a decision taken by the Assembly at its 3rd plenary meeting, on 18 September 1992, action on agenda item 79 - "Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development" - will be taken in the Second Committee.

The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 79.

The meeting rose at 12.35 p.m.